



In the Crosshairs

How Gun Violence Affects Women in Nevada

By Chelsea Parsons, Eugenio Weigend, and Lauren Speigel January 22, 2015

On March 25, 2010, Brittney Lavoll was shot in the head by her ex-boyfriend, Kevin Gipson, outside of the Las Vegas Jack in the Box fast-food restaurant where she worked.¹ Gipson had learned where Lavoll was working by calling one of her co-workers and then hid in the bushes outside of the restaurant until Lavoll arrived.

Gipson, who had two children with Lavoll, reportedly told police that he was angry because Lavoll refused to let him see the children. According to police, Gipson—who was a convicted felon—had been violent toward Lavoll in the past and had threatened her. Because of his criminal past, Gipson was prohibited from gun ownership under both federal and Nevada state law. However, he had no problem purchasing a .25 caliber handgun from a friend for \$50 in cash and \$50 in marijuana. He then used the handgun to murder Lavoll. Because Nevada does not require background checks for this type of private gun sale, Gipson's friend had no obligation to conduct a background check to ensure that Gipson was eligible to possess a firearm. Gipson admitted to the murder and was sentenced to 28 years to life in prison in February 2012.²

Tragically, Brittney Lavoll is not alone. Between 2003 and 2012, 185 women in Nevada were killed by an intimate partner.³ According to the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, 48.1 percent of women living in Nevada will experience rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime.⁴ But despite the scope of the problem, Nevada has remarkably weak laws to protect women from violent crime and, in particular, gun violence.

This issue brief presents data on the scope of gun violence against women in Nevada—paying particular attention to gun homicides that occur in a domestic violence context. It also discusses current weaknesses in state law that leave women vulnerable to future violence and allow dangerous domestic abusers and stalkers to have easy access to guns.

Gun violence against women in the United States

Overall, violent crime has declined in the United States over the past two decades, and in many respects, this country is safer now than it has ever been. But despite the progress in reducing violent crime, the United States continues to have a significant problem with gun-related violence. On average, 33,000 people are killed with guns each year in the United States, and roughly 33 people are murdered with guns every day.⁵

U.S. women face unique risks when it comes to fatal violence, including gun violence. They are much more likely than men to be killed by someone they know, while men are more often killed by strangers. Between 2003 and 2012, 34 percent of male violent crime victims in the United States knew their assailants, while 65 percent of female violent crime victims were attacked by an acquaintance.⁶ Intimate partners commit a significant amount of violence against women: Between 2003 and 2012, 33.7 percent of all female murder victims were killed by an intimate partner.⁷

When domestic violence turns fatal, it is often due to the presence of a gun. Women are 500 percent more likely to be murdered by an intimate partner when a gun is present and there is a history of domestic violence.⁸ Between 2003 and 2012, 55 percent of women murdered by an intimate partner in the United States were killed with a gun.⁹ To put these numbers in context, from 2001 through 2012, more women in the United States have been murdered by an intimate partner using a gun than the total number of U.S. troops killed in combat in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined.¹⁰

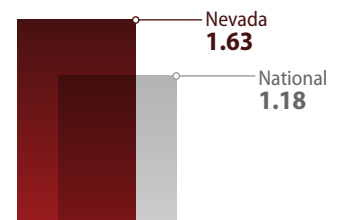
Gun violence against women in Nevada

The Center for American Progress conducted new analysis of data collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to assess the scope of gun violence against women in Nevada. The analysis revealed that the problem is particularly acute in the state. Women in Nevada are murdered with guns at a rate much higher than the national average: Between 2003 and 2012, Nevada ranked eighth among all 50 states for highest rates of gun murders of women. The gun murder rate for women in Nevada is 38.14 percent higher than the national average.¹¹

Not only are women in Nevada at a higher risk of gun homicide than women in other states, but they also face a higher risk of being murdered with a gun than men in Nevada. Between 2003 and 2012, Nevada ranked 21st for gun murders of men, and the gun murder rate for men in the state was below the national average.¹²

FIGURE 1
Women murdered in Nevada compared with the national average, 2003–2012

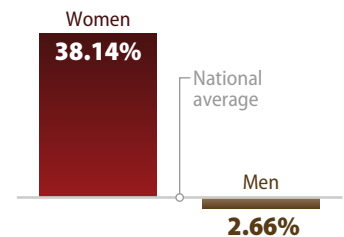
Firearm homicide rates per 100,000 residents



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Data & Statistics (WISQARS): Fatal Injury Data," available at <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html> (last accessed January 2015).

FIGURE 2
Comparison of firearm homicides of women and men in Nevada with the national average, 2003–2012

Percentage difference above and below national average



Source: Authors' calculation based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Data & Statistics (WISQARS): Fatal Injury Data," available at <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal.html> (last accessed January 2015).

A significant portion of the women murdered in Nevada are killed in a domestic violence or intimate partner context. Between 2003 and 2012, 40 percent of women murdered in Nevada were killed by an intimate partner. Again, Nevada exceeds the national average in this respect: Nationally, intimate partners commit roughly one-third of female homicides.¹³ Guns are a clear driver of this fatal violence: during the same time period, 50 percent of intimate-partner-related murders of women in Nevada were committed with a gun.¹⁴

The increased risk of gun violence facing women in Nevada is not merely an abstract issue or an interesting piece of data. Behind these statistics are the stories of real women, such as Brittney Lavoll, whose lives were cut short by abusers and stalkers with guns.

Veronica Erazo-Alderado and Sabrina Saldivar

Las Vegas, November 18, 2011

Jesus Saldivar stabbed and then shot his ex-girlfriend before stabbing their 3-year-old daughter to death on November 18, 2011. According to reports, Saldivar had recently lost his job, as well as his home due to foreclosure; Veronica had ended their seven-year relationship several months earlier. After killing Veronica and Sabrina, Saldivar put their bodies in his car and drove to a deserted area, where he killed himself. Several months before the shooting, Veronica filed a criminal complaint against him. Saldivar was facing a misdemeanor battery charge at the time of the shooting.¹⁵

Mary Inman

Elko, April 30, 2011

David Heinzig allegedly shot and killed his ex-wife, Mary Inman, on April 30, 2011, while she was working at Smith Power Products in Elko. In June 2010, Heinzig had been arrested for violating a protective order, and Mary had previously told police that Heinzig had stalked and threatened her. The couple divorced less than one year before the murder. Heinzig was found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound one day later at a motel in Las Vegas.¹⁶

Korinda Rodriguez

Reno, July 9, 2012

On July 9, 2012, Jeffrey Rodriguez murdered his 32-year-old wife Korinda on the side of U.S. Route 395 in Reno, Nevada. The couple had argued earlier in the day when Jeffrey accused Korinda of having an affair.

Korinda left for her job delivering newspapers, and Jeffrey followed her in a separate car. He ran her car off the highway, shot her in the chest, and fired at two individuals who stopped to help.¹⁷ He then fled the scene and attempted to commit suicide at home. He was unsuccessful, finally calling police to report he had shot his wife, with whom he had two young children. At the time of the murder, Jeffrey was a convicted felon and a Tier 2 sex offender; he was therefore prohibited under federal law from possessing a firearm. He was convicted in September 2014 and sentenced to life in prison.¹⁸

Maria Flores and Elizabeth Gomez

Las Vegas, June 1, 2013

Manuel Mata III allegedly shot and killed his girlfriend—Maria Flores—and her 17-year-old daughter, on June 1, 2013, at his father's home, where the family was staying. He also injured another one of Flores' children, a 4-year-old girl. In the months leading up to the shooting, Mata reportedly became increasingly jealous of Maria, accusing her of having an affair, and started drinking heavily. Maria told Mata two weeks before the shooting that she was going to move out of the house, but she ultimately stayed. After Mata shot Maria and her children with a .12 gauge Hawk Industries shotgun, he attempted to commit suicide. He had previously been arrested for driving under the influence and other traffic violations. He currently faces charges for murder and battery.¹⁹

Linda McCarty, Bobby Scherrer, and Bonnie Sherrer

Las Vegas, January 29, 2013

Jim McCarty allegedly shot and killed his wife, her two grown children, and their dog on January 29, 2013, before attempting suicide. Neighbors reported that the family had been dealing with financial and medical issues in the months before the shooting. McCarty was employed as a truck driver, and his wife was disabled after suffering a stroke several years earlier. He died from his self-inflicted wounds several days after the shooting.²⁰

Melissa Boyes

Las Vegas, April 6, 2013

Melissa Boyes, a 24-year-old woman, was shot and killed by her 41-year-old husband, Jarom Boyes, on April 6, 2013, after they had been out at a bar and began to argue. Once home, Boyes allegedly physically attacked Melissa by pushing her head through a wall, which prompted her to retrieve her gun to defend herself. Boyes took the gun from Melissa and used it to kill her. Both were stationed at Nellis Air Force Base at the time of the murder. Boyes initially told police that his wife had committed suicide, but detectives gathered enough evidence to convince him to confess one month after the shooting.²¹

Nevada's weak gun laws leave women vulnerable

Despite this crisis of gun violence against women in the state, Nevada has relatively few laws to prevent dangerous domestic abusers and stalkers from having easy access to guns. The Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence recently gave Nevada an “F” for the overall strength of its gun laws.²² Arguably the biggest gap in state law pertaining to guns is one that allows guns to change hands without background checks. Under federal law, federally licensed firearms dealers must conduct a background check before completing every gun sale; however, this requirement does not apply to guns sold by private individuals.²³ While many states have acted to close this loophole in the federal law and require background checks for all gun sales,²⁴ Nevada has not done so. This means individuals such as Kevin Gipson—convicted felons with reported histories of domestic violence—who are prohibited from buying or possessing guns can easily buy guns through private sales online, at gun shows, or anywhere else without a background check and with no questions asked.

In the months after the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, the Nevada legislature passed a bill to close this loophole and require background checks for private sales. In June 2013, however, Gov. Brian Sandoval (R) vetoed the legislation.²⁵ Nevada voters have continued to advocate for such a law, and in December 2014, they collected enough signatures to ensure that a measure requiring background checks for all gun sales will be on the ballot in the 2016 election.²⁶

Nevada has also not enacted any laws to curtail domestic abusers' and stalkers' access to guns, failing to match even the minimum standards set by federal law. These standards bar some individuals convicted of misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence crimes or subject to domestic violence restraining orders from buying or possessing guns.²⁷ To protect victims of domestic violence and stalking from gun violence, Nevada should enact the following legislation:

1. Require background checks on all gun sales.
2. Bar individuals convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence or stalking crimes and individuals who are subject to domestic violence restraining orders from buying and possessing guns.
3. Require convicted abusers to surrender any guns in their possession at the time that possession becomes prohibited.

Together, these proposals will help prevent convicted domestic abusers and stalkers from having easy access to guns and make Nevada a safer place for women and families.

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